black litigants to navigate what were very narrow channels of access/advocacy did not mean that white supremacy was not a real force in the Natchez district. She does not discuss the possibility (and I wonder if perhaps she should have) that by arguing in terms of property, these litigants inadvertently reinforced the structures of oppression for others who were unable to create spaces for themselves either within the institution of slavery or as free people of color.

In a fascinating appendix, Welch walks readers through her research process, which included a lot of time sifting through records in the basements of courthouses—and in sheds—in Louisiana and Mississippi, as well as the drying out and cleaning, relabeling, filing, and organizing of documents: files that, for years, had been forgotten. This is no small feat, and the fact that Welch was able to uncover the cases of more than 1,000 black litigants through her labors is to be commended. Moreover, readers must take seriously Welch’s implicit plea for the preservation and recovery of documents from other basements and storage facilities and the imperative that we should feel as scholars to do anything we can to aid in this process.

Throughout Black Litigants, Welch writes with clarity and purpose. Her thick descriptions and her narrative style will undoubtedly appeal to specialists and nonspecialists alike. Welch’s examination of black litigiousness in the lower courts of the antebellum South will, it is hoped, spur others into the basements of county courthouses to uncover other voices and circumstances that complicate our understanding of white hegemony and the so-called power of the Southern courtroom. This is a book that has implications not only for how we understand the nineteenth-century Natchez district, but also for how we read and understand court sources—and defendants, plaintiffs, and witnesses—in different courtrooms across both time and space.

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In this well-documented study of British slave law in the Atlantic world, Edward Rugemer compares the development of three different slave regimes:
Barbados, Jamaica, and South Carolina. Law was central to the maintenance of slavery in these regimes, and also serves as an important window into how these different slave societies reacted to armed resistance and other existential threats.

As a British colony, Barbados did not begin explicitly as a slave society. As is well known, it was the successful introduction of sugar after 1643 that began its transformation. By the time the first compendium of Barbados law was published in 1654, new restrictions on bound labor (no travel or trading, for example) signaled the change. By 1661, the Barbados law code had fully separated bound servants from slaves.

In the 1660s, Jamaica was still a small colony. This would change with the arrival of Governor Thomas Modyford, himself an agent of the Royal African Company (38). As planters swarmed in (many from Barbados), the colony shifted to sugar production. The slave trade followed. From the very beginning, the enslaved resisted, a fact reflected in Jamaica’s 1684 slave law. Perhaps most importantly, the Jamaican code of 1684 substituted “white” and “black” for the nomenclature “Christian” and “Negro,” thus formalizing racialized slavery in law. Jamaica’s 1684 slave code settled another aspect of slave law: the question of whether to treat the enslaved as real estate or chattel property. The real issue was whether creditors could demand that slaves be sold to satisfy debts, which they could if slaves were chattel property. It was for this reason that Barbados planters in 1668 had made slaves “real estates,” so that slaves could pass from deceased planters to their widows and heirs thereby bypassing creditors (49). This may have favored planters’ desire to protect their wealth, but it also diminished its liquidity. In 1684, Jamaica made slaves “chattels,” protecting only a limited number of slaves on any given plantation from the claims of creditors.

South Carolina’s early law codes revealed a society far less commercially developed. Despite a 1698 law designed to encourage white servants’ immigration, by 1708, the colony was half African, and thereafter Africans would be in the majority. Slave laws became increasingly brutal in the 1710s, before softening in 1722 (102). Rugemer follows scholars such as Jeffrey R. Young in calling this the “domestication” of slavery: the deliberate amelioration of harsh law and cultivation of enslaved family life as another means (alongside still brutal punishments) to control the enslaved.

This fundamental difference between South Carolina and Jamaica drives much of Rugemer’s book. Why did Jamaica militarize its slave society while South Carolina domesticated? Rugemer points to situational factors. The wars of the 1730s between Jamaican planters and African maroons put the planters on a military footing. The enticing profits of sugar had led planters to import primarily male slaves and, by 1740, Africans outnumbered Europeans by a ratio of 10:1. South Carolina, by contrast, achieved an earlier sex balance among the enslaved, resulting in more stable families that allowed the enslaved “to carve out a semblance of human dignity from the granite despair of their enslavement” (119).
The politics of slaveholders were shaped by their experience with the enslaved. Planters universally reacted to the landmark case of *Somerset v. Stewart* (1772) with fear and loathing, but South Carolinians gave it far less attention. In 1773, when South Carolinian planters were contemplating separation from Great Britain, Jamaican planters petitioned the king to double the number of soldiers garrisoned on the island (183). Slaveholders retrenched in both societies after the American and Haitian revolutions, but under different conditions. Jamaican planters were utterly dependent on government support, faced a limited geography for expansion, and found their influence in the metropole waning. South Carolina planters, on the other hand, gained significant political power within the United States, won protections for slavery in the Constitution, and expanded slavery through and beyond the Mississippi River Valley. The lessons are striking. Jamaican planters were unable to prevent the abolition of slavery in the 1830s. American slaveholders grew stronger, and only relinquished their power after a brutal war.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Rugemer’s book is how it consciously reorients the geography of American slavery southward, toward the Caribbean. Although more than two generations of careful scholarship have been making this argument, the gravitational pull of the traditional American national narrative still predominates. Rugemer’s compelling account offers a corrective, but this by no means is Rugemer’s greatest achievement. That would lie in his careful examination of law, power, violence, geography, economics, and the connections between them. Rugemer gives us a glimpse of the limits of law as a formative force, and of how it helps us understand the rise and fall of slavery in the Atlantic world.

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*They Were Her Property* is an engaging and provocative study of how white women participated in and profited from enslavement in the antebellum United States. Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers follows in detail how slavery shaped the